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The Capture of Fort William and Mary

December 14 and 15, 1774

BY

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THE CAPTURE OF FORT WILLIAM AND MARY, DECEMBER 14 AND 15, 1774.

Few events in the history of New Hampshire have excited more interest or caused more controversy than the successful attack upon Fort William and Mary, in Portsmouth harbor, on December 14, 1774; the removal of the powder contained in its magazine on the same afternoon: and the second capture of the fort, together with the small arms and other stores, on the night of the following day. Too much has been written that is not history, and many statements concerning these events are generally accepted as facts which have had their rise in the fertile imagination of some writer. Many articles have appeared in the public press, but only a few really scholarly attempts have been made to determine the actual facts.¹

Throughout the year 1774 the people of Portsmouth and vicinity shared in full measure the unrest that was felt throughout the whole country. Much sympathy was expressed for the people of Boston, and the populace were beginning to show signs of resisting the odious domination of the British ministry. The assembly had shown a disposition to refuse to vote the necessary supplies and men for Fort William and Mary. In May a message was sent from the committee at Portsmouth to the committee at Boston, promising assistance in anything agreed upon by the colonies.² On June 8th, Governor Wentworth dissolved the assembly which he had from time to time adjourned to prevent action toward the appointment of delegates to a provincial congress.³ On July 4, twenty-seven chests of tea had been quietly brought into Portsmouth. A town-meeting was immediately called,

¹ An especially fortunate find was made in the library of Mr. Lucien Thompson of Durham, N. H., consisting of several early copies of the *New Hampshire Spy* and the *New Hampshire Mercury* of the year 1789, which appear to be the only known ones extant and which contain descriptions of the affair over the signatures of two of the participants. Especial acknowledgment is due for the aid which Mr. Thompson has rendered.

² American Archives, by Peter Force, Vol. 1, p. 337.

³ Letter of Governor Wentworth. American Archives, Vol. 1, p. 393.

the consignee was forced to export the tea, and the vessel carrying it was kept under guard, until it finally sailed for Halifax.¹ On July 6, Governor Wentworth ordered the sheriff to direct the committee of correspondence, who had met to choose delegates for a general American congress, to disperse and keep the king's peace. This they did, but only to meet privately later in a tavern where they chose delegates to assemble in Exeter.² On August 29, Governor Wentworth wrote the Earl of Dartmouth that the assembly had met in Exeter, and adds "I think this Province is much more moderate than any other to the southward, although the spirit of enthusiasm is spread and requires the utmost vigilance and prudence to restrain it from violent excess."³ Again later, Governor Wentworth reported the arrival of a second consignment of tea with results similar to the first. On November 15 he reported continued discontent throughout the province, and fears that disturbances will continue unless quiet is restored in Massachusetts Bay.⁴ On December 2, he wrote that there is a growing unrest and a disposition on the part of the people to follow all the "Resolves of the Congress and to approve them fully."⁵

Thus it will be seen that when Paul Revere brought his message on December 13, 1774, from the committee in Boston to Mr. Samuel Cutts of the Portsmouth committee, announcing that troops were to be sent to reinforce the fort, and bringing information, also, of the removal of the military stores in Rhode Island, and of the king's order in council prohibiting the exportation of gunpowder and military stores to America, the people were in a state of mind ready for revolt. Mr. Cutts immediately called the committee together, and they proceeded to plan for the capture of the powder upon the following day. Governor Wentworth seems to have had some intimation of what might happen, for he sent word to Captain Cochran, commanding at the fort, to be upon his

¹ Letter of Governor Wentworth to Earl of Dartmouth, American Archives, Vol. I, p. 513.

² American Archives, Vol. I, pp. 516, 536.

³ American Archives, Vol. I, p. 744.

⁴ American Archives, Vol. I, p. 982.

⁵ American Archives, Vol. I, p. 1014.

guard. In Wentworth's report on the affair, however, he states that "before any suspicion could be had of their intentions, about four hundred men were gathered together." Certain it is that, about twelve o'clock on Wednesday, December 14, all secrecy ended; for members of the committee, accompanied by drum and fife, paraded the streets of Portsmouth and called the citizens together. By order of Governor Wentworth the chief justice of the province made proclamation that what they proposed was open rebellion against the king, but they did not waiver, and having finally gathered together a company of their townsmen, and such others as could be obtained from the adjoining towns of Newcastle and Rye, in all about four hundred men, they proceeded to Fort William and Mary. There they were warned by Captain Cochran not to enter, and were fired upon both by cannon and small arms. No one appears to have been injured, however, and they immediately stormed the fort, and easily overcame such resistance as the one officer and five effective men could offer. Having captured the fort, they proceeded to haul down the king's colors, and then removed all of the gunpowder in the magazine, with the exception of one barrel. About one hundred barrels of powder were so obtained, and these were sent up the Piscataqua to Durham, that same evening, with a letter to General Sullivan, who had not been in Portsmouth that day.

On the following day, Thursday, December 15, 1774, a party of men came from Durham to Portsmouth, and, that night, together with other citizens, under the leadership of John Sullivan, they again took the fort and carried off the lighter cannon and all of the small arms. On Friday, a party under command of Captain Nathaniel Folsom of Exeter, came to Portsmouth and remained on guard all day; until in the afternoon, on the rising tide, the arms were sent up the river. They finally reached Durham; but only after many weary hours of cutting through the ice, which had just formed in the branch of the Piscataqua, which leads up to that town.

The main details of the proceedings of the three days may easily be gathered from the following official documents and letters of the time which have fortunately been preserved to us.

On Wednesday, December 14, 1774, Governor Wentworth wrote to Governor Gage as follows:¹

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE,
Dec. 14, 1774.

SIR.—I have the honor to receive your Excellency's letter of the 19th inst. with the letter from the Secretary of State, which were both delivered to me on Monday evening last by Mr. Whiting.

It is with the utmost concern I am called upon by my duty to the King to communicate to your Excellency a most unhappy affair perpetrated here this day.

Yesterday in the afternoon, Paul Revere arrived in this town, express from the committee in Boston to another committee in this town, and delivered his dispatch to Mr. Samuel Cutts, merchant in this town, who immediately convened the committee of which he was one, and as I learn, laid it before them. This day before any suspicions could be had of their intentions, about four hundred men were collected together, and immediately proceeded to his Majesty's Castle, William and Mary, at the entrance of this harbour, and forcibly took possession thereof: notwithstanding the best defence that could be made by Captain Cochran (whose conduct has been extremely laudable, as your Excellency will see by the enclosed letter from him), and by violence carried away upwards of one hundred barrels of powder belonging to the King, deposited in the castle. I am informed that expresses have been circulated through the neighboring towns, to collect a number of people to-morrow, or as soon as possible, to carry away all the cannon and arms belonging to the castle which they will undoubtedly effect, unless some assistance should arrive from Boston in time to prevent it. This event too plainly proves the imbecility of this government to carry into execution his Majesty's order in Council, for seizing and detaining arms and ammunition imported into this Province, without some strong ships of war in this harbor. Neither is the Province or custom house treasury in any degree safe, if it should come into the mind of the popular leaders to seize upon them.

The principal persons who took the lead in this enormity are well known. Upon the best information I can obtain, this mischief originates from the publishing of the Secretary of State's letter, and the King's order in Council at Rhode Island, prohibiting the exportation of military stores from Great

¹ American Archives, Vol. I, p. 1042; Appendix Belknap, Vol. III, p. 328, 1812; N. H. Provincial Papers, Vol. VII, p. 420.

Britain, and the proceedings in that Colony, in consequence of it, which have been published here by the forementioned Mr. Revere; and the dispatch brought, before which all was perfectly quiet and peaceable here. I am etc.

(Signed)

J. WENTWORTH.

The report of Captain Cochran to Governor Wentworth referred to above, dated the 14th of December, 1774, reads: ¹

May it please your Excellency:

I received your Excellency's favour of yesterday, and in obedience thereto kept a strict watch all night, and added two men to my usual number, being all I could get. Nothing material occurred till this day, one o'clock, when I was informed there were a number of people coming to take possession of the Fort, upon which, having only five effective men with me, I prepared to make the best defence I could, and pointed some guns to those places where I expected they would enter. About three o'clock, the Fort was beset on all sides by upwards of four hundred men. I told them on their peril not to enter. They replied they would. I immediately ordered three four pounders to be fired on them, and then the small arms; and, before we could be ready to fire again, we were stormed on all quarters, and they immediately secured both me and my men, and kept us prisoners about one hour and a half, during which time they broke open the powder-house, and took all the powder away, except one barrel; and having put it into boats and sent it off, they released me from confinement. To which I can only add, that I did all in my power to defend the fort, but all my efforts could not avail against so great a number.

I am your Excellency's, etc.,

(Signed)

JOHN COCHRAN.

On Thursday, the 15th of December, Governor Wentworth ordered thirty effective men to be enlisted or impressed for the protection of Fort William and Mary without result, as the following will testify: ²

PROVINCE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE.

To Capt. John Dennet & the Commission officer of the First Regiment of Militia in the Province of New Hampshire:

GENTLEMEN.—You are without Delay out of your several companies to enlist or Impress Thirty effective men to serve

¹ American Archives, Vol. I, p. 1042; Appendix to Belknap, Vol. III, p. 330; N. H. Provincial Papers, Vol. VII, p. 420.

² N. H. Provincial Papers, Vol. II, p. 421.

his Majesty as a Guard & Protection to his Fort William and Mary at New Castle and make return immediately to me of your doings therein with the Names of the Persons so enlisted etc., that Provision may be made for their being regularly placed in the said Garrison, for all which this is your Warrant.

I am Gentlemen, your friend etc

THEODORE ATKINSON, Maj^r Gen^l.

Dated at Portsm^o on the 15th of
Decem^r 1774 12 o'clock at noon.

Indorsed on the back of the foregoing order is the following:

Pursuant to the within Warrant we have Paraded the streets, caused the Drums to be Beat, & Proclamation to be made at all the Publick corners, & on the Place of Parade. No Person appearing to Enlist, we wait for further orders.

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | JOHN DENNET, | } <i>Commanding</i> |
| Portsmouth, 15 December | JAMES STOODLEY, | |
| 6 o'clock, P. M. | | } <i>Officers.</i> |

On Friday Governor Wentworth wrote to General Gage a further report, dated Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the 16th of December, 1774: ¹

On Wednesday last after 12 o'clock, an insurrection suddenly took place in town, and immediately proceeded to His Majesty's castle, attacked, overpowered, wounded and confined the Captain, and thence took away all the King's powder. Yesterday, numbers were assembled, and, last night, brought off many cannon, etc. and sixty muskets. This day, the town is full of armed men, who refuse to disperse, but appear determined to complete the dismantling of the fortress entirely. Hitherto the people have abstained from private or personal injuries; how long they will be so prevailed on, it is impossible to say. I most sincerely lament the present distractions, which seem to have burst forth by means of a letter, from William Cooper to Samuel Cutts, delivered here on Tuesday last, P. M., by Paul Revere. I have not time to add further on this lamentable subject.

On December 16th a gentleman in Portsmouth wrote to a gentleman in New York the following letter: ²

¹ American Archives, Vol. I, p. 1042; Appendix Belknap, Vol. III, p. 331, 1812; N. H. Provincial Papers, Vol. VII, p. 422.

² *Mass. Gazette, Post Boy & Advertiser*, Dec. 19, 1774; *N. H. Gazette* of Dec. 23, 1774; American Archives, Vol. I, p. 1042; New Hampshire Provincial Papers, Vol. VII, p. 423.

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE, Dec^r 16th, 1774.

We have been in confusion here for two days, on account of an express from Boston, informing that two Regiments were coming to take possession of our Forts. By beat of drum, two hundred men immediately assembled and went to the Castle, in two gondolas, who on their way were joined by one hundred and fifty more, and demanded the surrender of the Fort, which Captain Cochran refused, and fired three Guns, but no lives were lost; upon which they immediately scaled the walls, disarmed the Captain and his men, took possession of ninety-seven barrels of Powder, put it on board the Gondolas, brought it up to Town, and went off with it some distance into the country. Yesterday the town was full of men from the country, who marched in in fours, chose a Committee to wait on The Governor, who assured them he knew of no such design as sending Troops, Ships, etc. This morning I hear there are a thousand or fifteen hundred men on their march to town. The Governor and the Council sat yesterday on the affair, and are now meeting again. The men who came down, are those of the best property and vote in the Province.

Another gentleman in Portsmouth, writing on Saturday, December the 17th, gives also the main facts in the case, but he states that the powder was sent up to Exeter, which may have been reported at the time, but which is shown to be incorrect by the letter of General Sullivan, published in the *New Hampshire Mercury* of May, 1785. He also magnifies some of the other facts. The letter, however, adds its testimony to the main occurrences of the week.¹

PORTSMOUTH, N. H., December 17, 1774.

On Wednesday last a Drum and fife pervaded the streets of Portsmouth, accompanied by several Committee-men, and the Sons of Liberty, publickly avowing their intention of taking possession of Fort William and Mary, which was garrisoned by six invalids. After a great number of people had collected together, they embarked on board scows, boats, etc., entered the Fort, seized the Gunpowder, fired off the Guns, and carried the Powder up to Exeter a Town fifteen miles distant. The quantity was about two hundred to two hundred and twenty barrels; the day after, while the Governor and Council were assembled in the Council Chamber, between two and three hundred persons came from Durham, and the adjoining

¹ American Archives, Vol. I, p. 1043; N. H. Provincial Papers, Vol. VII, p. 423.

Towns, headed by Major Sullivan, one of the Delegates of the Congress; they drew up before the Council Chamber, and demanded an answer to the following question : Whether there were any ships or troops expected here, or if the Governor had wrote for any? They were answered that his Excellency knew of no forces coming hither, and that none had been sent for; upon which they retired to the Taverns and about ten or eleven o'clock at night, a large party repaired to the Fort, and it is said they carried away all the small arms. This morning about sixty horsemen accoutred, came into Town by eleven o'clock their intention, it is suspected, is to dismantle the Fort, and throw the Cannon, consisting of a fine train of 42-pounders, into the sea.

In a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth, dated " Portsmouth, 20th Dec. 1774," Governor Wentworth gives most complete account, and says: ¹

On Tuesday, the 13th instant in the afternoon, one Paul Revere arrived express with letters from some of the leaders in Boston to Mr. Samuel Cutts, merchant of this town. Reports were soon circulated that the fort at Rhode Island had been dismantled, and the Gunpowder and other stores removed up to Providence, and an Extract of the circular letter directing the seizure of gunpowder was printed in a Boston newspaper of the 12th in consequence, as I have been informed, of the said letters having been communicated to the House of Assembly at Rhode Island. And it was also falsely given out that troops were embarking at Boston to come and take possession of William and Mary Castle in this Harbour. These rumours soon raised an alarm in the town; and, although I did not expect that the people would be so audacious as to make any attack of the castle, yet I sent orders to the captain at the Fort to be upon his guard.

On Wednesday, the 14th, about 12 o'clock, news was brought to me that a Drum was beating about the town to collect the Populace together in order to go and take away the Gunpowder and dismantle the Fort. Immediately sent the Chief Justice of the Province to warn them from engaging in such an attempt. He went to them, where they were collected in the centre of the town, near the townhouse, explained to them the nature of the offence they proposed to commit, told them it was not short of Rebellion and intreated them to desist from it and disperse. But all to no purpose. They went

¹ New England Historical and Genealogical Reg., 1869, p. 276.

to the Island; and being found there by the inhabitants of the towns of Newcastle and Rye, formed in all a body of about four hundred men, and the Castle being in too weak a condition for defence (as I have in former letters explained to your Lordship) they forced their entrance, in spite of Captain Cochran; who defended it as long as he could: but having only the assistance of five men, their numbers overpowered them. After they entered the Fort, they seized upon the Captain, triumphantly gave three Huzzas, and hauled down the King's colours. They then put the captain and men under confinement, broke open the Gunpowder magazine, and carried off about 100 Barrels of Gunpowder, but discharged the captain and men from their confinement before their departure.

On Thursday, the 15th, in the morning, a party of men came from the country, accompanied by Mr. (Gen. John) Sullivan, one of the New Hampshire delegates to the congress, to take away the cannon from the fort also. Mr. Sullivan declared that he had taken pains to prevail upon them to return home again; and said as there was no certain intelligence of troops being coming to take possession of the Castle, he would still use his utmost endeavors to disperse them.

While the town was thus full of men, a committee of them came to me to solicit for pardon or a suspension of prosecution against the persons that took away the Gunpowder. I told them I could not promise them any such thing; but, if they dispersed and restored the Gunpowder, which I earnestly exhorted them to do, I said I hoped His Majesty may be thereby induced to consider it an alleviation of the offence. They parted from me, in all appearance, perfectly disposed to follow the advice I had given them; and, having proceeded directly to the rest of their associates, they all publicly voted, about five o'clock in the afternoon, near the Town House, to return home; which it was thought they would have done, and it also was further expected that the gunpowder would have been restored by the morning.

But the people instead of dispersing, went to the castle in the night, headed by Mr. Sullivan, and took away sixteen pieces of cannon, about sixty muskets, and other military stores, and brought them to the out Borders of the Town.

On Friday morning, the 16th, Mr. Folsom, the other delegate, came to town that morning, with a great number of armed men, who remained in Town as a guard till the flow of the tide in the evening when the cannon were sent in Gondolas up the River into the country, and they all dispersed without having done any personal injury to anybody in town.

They threatened to return again in order to dismantle the fort entirely, and to carry off or destroy the remaining heavy cannon (about seventy pieces), and also to seize upon the Province Treasury, all of which there was reasonable ground to fear they would do, after what they had already done; but on the Gunpowder's being taken away, I wrote to General Gage and Admiral Graves for assistance to restrain the boisterous temper of the people; upon which the admiral ordered the armed ships *Canceaux* and *Scarborough* here, and they arrived (the former the 17th and the latter on the 19th) in time to prevent the further dismantling of the Fort.

Further on Governor Wentworth says the government has no power to bring the offenders to punishment.

No jail would hold them long and no jury would find them guilty; for, by the false alarm that has been raised throughout the country, it is considered by the weak and ignorant, who have the rule in these times, an act of self-preservation.

Again he says:

I tried to dissuade them by the civil authority, sheriff, magistrates, etc., and did all I could to get the militia raised, but to no purpose.

Under date of December 20th, 1774, a gentleman in Boston writing to a Mr. Rivington of New York, says:¹

On Monday the 12th inst. our worthy citizen, Mr. Paul Revere, was sent express from only two or three of the Committee of Correspondence at Boston, as I am creditably informed (of whom no number under seven are empowered to act) to a like committee at Portsmouth, N. H., informing them as 't is said "That orders had been sent to the Governors of their Provinces to deliver up their several Fortifications or Castles to General Gage, and that a number of Troops had the preceding day embarked on board transports with a design to proceed and take possession of said Castles." That in consequence thereof the House of Assembly of Rhode Island had caused the Fort to be dismantled and the Guns, Ammunitions, etc., to be removed to Providence.

Upon receiving this intelligence the Committee at Portsmouth was called together to advise what was to be done in so alarming a crisis; but not having a full meeting, nor able to determine upon any measures proper to be taken, they con-

¹American Archives, Vol. I, p. 1054.

cluded to defer the matter till the next day, when a fuller meeting of said committee was expected, but two or three warm zealous members, having the good of their country at heart more than the others, and thinking any further deliberation on so important an affair unnecessary, gave out their order early the next morning for the drums to be beat to raise Volunteers to go and take the King's Fort. With difficulty a number of men were persuaded to convene, who proceeded to the Fort, which is situated at New Castle, an island about two miles from the Town, and being there joined by a number of the inhabitants of said New Castle, amounted to near four hundred men; They invested the Fort and being refused admittance by the Commander of it, who had only five men with him, and who discharged several guns at them, scaled the walls and soon overpowered and pinioned the Commander. They then struck the King's colors, with three cheers broke open the Powder House, and carried off one hundred and three barrels of powder, leaving only one behind.

Previous to this, expresses had been sent out to alarm the country. Accordingly, a large body of men marched the next day from Durham headed by two Generals, Major Sullivan, one of the worthy Delegates, who represented that Province in the Continental Congress, and the Parson of the Parish, who being long accustomed to apply himself more to the care of the bodies than the souls of his parishioners, had forgotten that the weapons of his warfare ought to be spiritual, and not carnal, and therefore marched down to supply himself with the latter, from the King's Fort, and assisted in robbing him of his warlike stores. After being drawn up on parade, they chose a Committee, consisting of those persons who had been most active in the riot of the preceding day, with Major Sullivan and some others, to wait on the Governor, and know of him whether any of the King's Troops or Ships were expected. The Governor after expressing to them his great concern for the consequences of taking the Powder from the Fort, which they pretended to disapprove and be ignorant of, assured them that he knew of neither Troops or Ships coming into the Province, and ordered the Major, as a Magistrate, to go and disperse the people. When the Committee returned to the body, and reported what the Governor had told them, they voted it was satisfactory, and that they would return home. But by the eloquent harangue of their Demosthenes they were first prevailed upon to vote that they took part with and approved of the measures of those who had taken the Powder. Matters appeared then to subside, and it was thought every

man had peaceably returned to his own home. Instead of this, Major Sullivan, with about seventy of his clients, concealed themselves till the evening, and then went to the Fort, and brought off in Gondolas all the small arms, with fifteen 4-pounders and one 9-pounder, and a quantity of twelve and four and twenty pound shot, which they conveyed to Durham, etc.

The day following being Friday, another body of men from Exeter headed by Colonel Folsom, the other Delegate to the Continental Congress, marched into Portsmouth, and paraded about the Town, and having passed several votes expressive of their approbation of the measures that had been pursued by the bodies of the two preceding days in robbing the fort of Guns, Powder, etc., retired home in the evening, without further mischief.

Thus by this false alarm was a great part of that Province, which though staunch in the cause of liberty, before in a state of peace and good order, kept for three days in the greatest confusion, and the good people of it persuaded by a few flaming demagogues, to commit a most outrageous overt act of treason and rebellion.

No history, I believe, will furnish us with an instance of a King's Fort being taken and his Colors struck by his own subjects in time of peace, and without any cause or provocation.

In the *New Hampshire Gazette* of Friday, December 23, appeared a letter which is somewhat humorous in its nature, directed to Mr. Printer, and signed a "Lover of Order." This is interesting to us chiefly because it shows that the king's order prohibiting the exportation of arms was the cause here as it had been in Rhode Island of the seizure of the powder. This letter says, among other things, "Alarmed with the tendency of the Quebec Act, with the accounts that the Canadians and Indians were to be called forth to enforce the Acts of Parliament, so disagreeable to all the Colonies, long inured to defend themselves in the wide extended frontiers of this Province, by their valour against the restless savages of the Wilderness, without any other aid, and while destitute of arms necessary for such defense. finding that His Majesty, not knowing their peculiar defensless State, had been pleased to prohibit the Exportation of Powder, arms, and other warlike stores to the Colonies without special License. . . . Some of the good People of

this Province, in the wonted Honesty and Simplicity of their hearts, imagined that no one would have just reason to complain of their too great Forwardness if they seasonably removed some of the warlike stores from the Fort. . . . Which they accordingly effected without any great Tumult or Opposition."

Again in the same paper the following notice appears :

"Since our last, arrived here his Majesty's Ships *Canceaux*, Capt. Mowatt, and the *Scarborough*, Capt. Barclay, both from Boston, with 80 or 100 soldiers aboard."

On the 26th of December Governor Wentworth issued the following proclamation :

A PROCLAMATION BY THE GOVERNOR.²

Whereas, several Bodies of Men did, in the day time of the 14th and in the Night of the 15th of this Instant December, in the most daring and rebellious Manner invest, attack and forcibly enter into his Majesty's Castle William and Mary in this Province, and overpowering and confining the Captain and Garrison, did, besides committing many treasonable Insults and Outrages, break open the Magazine of said Castle and plunder it of above One hundred Barrels of Gunpowder, with upwards of sixty Stand of small Arms, and did also force from the Ramparts of said Castles and carry off sixteen Pieces of Cannon, and other military Stores, in open Hostility and direct Oppugnation of his Majesty's Government and in the most atrocious Contempt of his Crown and Dignity :—

I Do, by Advice and Consent of his Majesty's Council, issue this Proclamation, ordering and requiring in his Majesty's Name, all Magistrates and other officers whether Civil or Military, as they regard their Duty to the King and the Tenor of the Oaths they have solemnly taken and subscribed, to exert themselves in detecting and securing in some of his Majesty's Goals in this Province the said Offenders, in Order to their being brought to condign punishment; And from motives of Duty to the King and Regard to the welfare of the good People of this Province; I do in the most earnest and solemn Manner, exhort and enjoin you, his Majesty's liege Subjects of this Government, to beware of suffering yourselves to be seduced by the false Art & Menaces of abandoned Men, to abet,

¹ N. H. Provincial Papers, Vol. VII, p. 423.

² Copied from printed Proclamation in MS. Corr., Vol. III, p. 334.

protect or screen from Justice any of the said high handed Offenders, or to withhold or secrete his Majesty's Munition forcibly taken from his Castle; but that each and every of you will use your utmost endeavor to detect and discover the Perpetrators of these Crimes to the civil Magistrate, and assist in securing and bringing them to Justice, and in recovering the King's Munition; This Injunction it is my bounden Duty to lay strictly upon you, and to require your Obedience thereto: as you value individually your Faith and Allegiance to his Majesty, as you wish to preserve that Reputation to the Province in general; and as you would avert the most dreadful but most certain Consequences of a contrary conduct to yourselves and Posterity.

Given at the Council-chamber in Portsmouth, the 26th Day of December, in the 15th year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Third, by the Grace of God, of great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, etc., and in the year of our Lord Christ, 1774.

J. WENTWORTH.

By his Excellency's Command
with advice of Council,
THEODORE ATKINSON, Sec'y.

God Save the King.

Again Governor Wentworth wrote to Lord Dartmouth, under date 28 December, 1774. He says: ¹

It is with the greatest concern I perceive the unlimited influence that the popular leaders in Boston obtain in this Province, especially since the outrage of the 14th instant. In-somuch, that I think the people here are disposed to attempt any measure required by those few men; and in consequence thereof, are arming and exercising men as if for immediate war.

And further: In a letter to George Erving, Esq., dated Portsmouth, 5 January, 1775, referring to the 14th of December, when the castle was seized, he says:

The powers of magistracy have been faithfully and repeatedly tried. Governor, Council, Chief Justice, Sheriff, and Justices of the Peace personally appeared; Proclamation made according to law for all to disperse and desist; the militia ordered out: drums beat, etc.; yet all of no avail. Not one man

¹ New England Hist. and Gen. Register, 1869, p. 277.

appeared to assist in executing the law. And it was impossible for me, with four Councillors, two Justices, one Sheriff, Mr. Macdonough, and Mr. Benning Wentworth, to subdue such multitudes, for not one other man would come forth. Not even the Revenue officers—all chose to shrink in safety from the storm, and suffered me to remain exposed to the folly and madness of an enraged multitude, daily and hourly increasing in numbers and delusion.

He says,—

Captain Cochran and his five men defended a ruinous castle, with the walls in many places down, at length knocked down, their arms broken and taken from them by above one hundred to one; the captain was confined and at last would not nor did not give up the keys notwithstanding every menace they could invent; finally they broke the doors with axes and crowbars.

Jeremy Belknap, whose *History of New Hampshire* was written some years before its publication, and who was a contemporary and friend of Sullivan and Langdon, gives us the following account, which, in spite of criticisms upon it, will bear the closest scrutiny, and is essentially accurate as are most of the accounts of that first historian of New Hampshire.

Belknap's *History of New Hampshire*, Vol. II, p. 288 :

An order having been passed by the King in Council prohibiting the exportation of gunpowder and other military stores to America, a copy of it was brought by express to Portsmouth at a time when a ship of war was daily expected from Boston with a party of troops to take possession of Fort William and Mary, at the entrance of the harbor. The committee of the town with all possible secrecy and dispatch collected a company from that and some of the neighboring towns; and before the Governor had any suspicion of their intentions, they proceeded to Newcastle and assaulted the Fort. The Captain and his five men (which was the whole garrison) were confined, and one hundred barrels of powder were carried off. The next day another company went and removed fifteen of the lightest cannon, and all the small arms, with some other warlike stores, which they distributed in the several towns under the care of the committees. Major John Sullivan and Captain John Langdon distinguished themselves as leaders in this affair. It was transacted with great expedition and alacrity, and in the most fortunate point of time, just before the arrival of the *Scarboro*

frigate and *Causeau* sloop, with several companies of soldiers, who took possession of the Fort and of the heavy cannon which had not been removed.

The governor put the five men who belonged to the fort on board the ship of war to be reserved as evidences in case of a prosecution of the offenders for high treason; and having consulted council in this and the neighboring Province, thought it his duty; that he might prevent any charge of misprision of treason against himself; to dismiss from public trust, all those persons concerned in the assault of the fort, who had held any office under the government and concerning whose proceedings he had authentic testimony. He also issued a proclamation, commanding all officers, civil and military, to assist in detecting and securing the offenders; and exhorting all the people to beware of being seduced by the false arts and menaces of abandoned men.

This closes the list of documents of the immediate period bearing upon the affair, and they seem to be sufficiently clear and to agree so closely as to leave little room for the controversies that have taken place. It is true that they mention but few names and give few details from the patriot's standpoint. Neither do they state anything authentic as to the disposal of the military stores nor of the influence this uprising had upon the future course of the Revolution.

The main questions in dispute have been (1) the disposal of the powder and military stores; (2) the names of the leaders in the affair and such of their men as could be determined; (3) whether the tradition of the use of this powder at Bunker Hill is founded on fact; and (4) whether or not this was the first real uprising of the Revolution. A study of some of the later documents that bear upon these questions will help our conclusion, and where tradition aids it will be considered as tradition and not as history; giving weight to traditional statements in accordance with the nearness of their origin to the date of the occurrence or to the actor concerned therein.

I. THE DISPOSAL OF THE POWDER.

Among the more important data to which we can give unquestioned weight is an article heretofore unnoticed in the *New Hampshire Mercury* of 1785 and in the *New Hampshire Spy* of 1789. In one of these General Sullivan refers to an

anonymous attack made upon him in the *New Hampshire Mercury* of April 19, 1785, of which no copy appears to be in existence, although diligent search has been made. It is probable, however, that the article was the same as one appearing in the *New Hampshire Gazette* of about the same date and signed "Honestus," which contains nothing new except that the author speaks of the powder as having been sent to Exeter, where eventually much of it was undoubtedly stored. General Sullivan also refers to an act of congress of Tuesday, July 31, 1781, when the continental congress ordered¹ "That the board of treasury pass to the credit of General Sullivan the following sums in specie, viz.: One hundred dollars as a compensation for the expenses incurred by him in securing the military stores and ordinances at Fort William and Mary, New Hampshire, in the year 1775, and distributing them in various parts of the country for the use of the United States; one thousand dollars for the extraordinary expenses, necessarily incurred by him as the commanding officer in a separate department, for which no provision or compensation has been made; and four hundred dollars as a reimbursement of the expense incurred by him after his resignation for the recovery of his health which he had lost in the service and was thereby induced to retire."

The article of General Sullivan above referred to appeared in the *New Hampshire Mercury* of May 3, 1785, and was addressed to "The Impartial Public," and is as follows:

Although I have no desire to satisfy or even to answer, a malicious, false, and cowardly writer, who under a feigned and very improper signature, has endeavored to wound my reputation, by a publication in the *New-Hampshire Mercury* of the 19th ultimo: yet in as much as I am conscious of having acted with uprightness in every part of my political conduct, I shall for your satisfaction answer the three charges which his malice has suggested, and which his knowledge of their falsity has prevented being signed by his proper name.

The first charge is obtaining a considerable sum from Congress by false representations, respecting the taking powder from fort William and Mary.

Secondly, Giving up the fishing-ground. And,

¹ Journal of Congress for the year 1781, Vol. VII, 159.

Thirdly, Receiving a bribe in my office of Attorney-General, which prevented my complying with my duty in endeavoring to confiscate a valuable estate; by which I suppose he means, Col. Boyd's.

To answer the first it will be necessary to relate the manner of taking the stores from the fort.

When I returned from Congress in 1774 and saw the order of the British King and Council, prohibiting military stores being sent to this country; I took the alarm, clearly perceived the designs of the British ministry, and wrote several pieces upon the necessity of securing military stores; which pieces were published in several papers.

On the 18th of December [date is evidently given from memory and is wrong] some gentlemen belonging to Portsmouth, went to the fort and took sundry barrels of powder and sent in a gondola one hundred and ten barrels to my care; which myself and others deposited in places of security. The next day a report was spread that two vessels of war were coming from Boston to take possession of the fort and harbour.

I went down with a large number of men and in the night following went in person with gondolas, took possession of the fort, brought away the remainder of the powder, the small arms, bayonets, and cartouch-boxes, together with the cannon and ordnance stores; was out all night, and returned to Portsmouth next day. I might here add that I bore the expense of all the party. The gondolas, with the stores, were brought to Durham, after several days spent in cutting the ice, Durham river being then frozen over; the cannon, etc., was then deposited in places of security. These are facts known to almost every person in the State—and to all them concerned, that almost the whole expense was borne by me; notwithstanding which I never applied for a single farthing to Congress, or any other body, for this service; and when a committee of Congress, who were appointed to report what was due for my allowance in separate departments where I commanded, reported one hundred dollars for this service, I warmly opposed it, and told Congress I never expected, or desired a single farthing for it—for the truth of this I appeal to the Hon. Judge Livermore, who was with me in Congress, at the time, and knows every fact relating to it; he is now on the circuit through the state, consequently any gentleman may satisfy himself, by asking him whether these facts are true or false.

But to prove whether Congress has been generous to me in their grants, I beg leave to mention that by a resolve of Congress of the 15th of June, 1775, general officers in separate depart-

ments, were to be allowed one hundred and fifty dollars per month, over and above their wages : I served thirty months in separate departments, and Congress made me a grant of thirteen hundred dollars only, in lieu of four thousand eight hundred which was my due : it is true one hundred of it was reported for the above-mentioned service, but upon my objecting to it, was not in reality granted in that light—and further, to prove the generosity of Congress to me, I now say, that for near five years' service, I have never received only the nominal sum in paper money for my services, and am the only officer in America that has received no depreciation or allowance therefor.

* * * * *

JOHN SULLIVAN.

Durham, April 23, 1785.

Among the many political feuds early existing among the prominent men of the state of New Hampshire one had broken out between Judge Ebenezer Thompson of Durham and Gen. John Sullivan. This had been fanned into open warfare from the fact that a quarrel had taken place between their sons in which the fathers afterwards took sides. Lawsuits were begun and appeals made to the public through the press. Fortunately for our purpose, one of the points in controversy between them was the respective parts each had taken at the capture of Fort William and Mary. As many of the participants were alive, who knew all the facts, both were naturally careful to have their statements accurate. The first number of this series appeared in an article in the *New Hampshire Spy* of Friday, March 6, 1789, signed "An Enemy to Deceit," in which an unnamed gentleman (Judge Ebenezer Thompson) is accused of appearing at Exeter at town-meeting to work against the election of General Sullivan as president of the state, and of keeping back a number of votes in the election of 1786.¹ The only statement of interest to us is the following :

It surely cannot be forgotten that this gentleman, in company with a number of others, went from Durham to Portsmouth in December, 1774, to assist in securing the stores at Fort William and Mary; and when Governor Wentworth suspended him and sundry others on that account he was restored by making oath before George Atkinson, Esq. [then Deputy Secretary], that he was not concerned.

¹Ebenezer Thompson afterwards refuted this charge by affidavits, etc.

In the *New Hampshire Spy* of Friday, March 13, 1789, Judge Ebenezer Thompson defends himself from the attack of "An Enemy to Deceit," whom he assumes to be General Sullivan, and among other things says :

That I ever was concerned, directly or indirectly, in taking the stores from Fort William and Mary, in 1774, is absolutely false. But had it been the case I should not have thought of applying to, or receiving from, Congress a large pecuniary reward by single service. But what a gentleman did who assisted in the matter will appear by the following extract from a resolution of Congress printed in the *Journal*, Vol. VII, *p.* 159 :

"Ordered that the Board of Treasury pass to the credit of John Sullivan in Specie one hundred dollars as a compensation for the expense incurred by him in securing the military stores and ordinance in Fort William and Mary, New Hampshire, in the year 1775."

It is a well-known fact that the Hon. John Langdon, Esq., and a number of other persons took the powder from the aforesaid fort and sent it into the country before the gentleman who received the reward knew anything about it.

(Signed) EBENEZER THOMPSON.

Durham, March 11, 1789.

In the *New Hampshire Spy* of March 17, 1789, General Sullivan addresses a reply to "Ebenezer Thompson, Esq." and after refusing to affirm or deny his authorship of the article signed "An Enemy to Deceit," he discusses the Exeter affair and the 1786 election and then the following appears :

As different ideas may be affixed to the words directly or indirectly, I shall not assert that you were directly or indirectly concerned in taking the stores from Fort William & Mary, in 1774 ; but will relate facts as they are. In the night of the 18th of December, 1774 [again he has the date from memory incorrect], a messenger came to my house from the Hon. Col. Long, and I think also signed by President Langdon, informing that one hundred barrels of powder were sent to my care ; that they had been to the fort and secured as much of the powder as they could ; and desired me to come down with a party to secure the remainder, with the cannon and munitions of war, as they were in danger of being seized by the British ships. I mustered hands—took care of the powder, part of which was lodged in your house. The next morning we mustered and you went to

Portsmouth in company with about thirty or forty; among whom was the Rev. Mr. Adams, Deacon Norton, Lieut. Durgin, Capt. Jonathan Woodman, Mr. Aaron Davis, and, I think, Mr. Footman of Dover, and many others,—I think you did not go down to the fort; that was at night when a number of us mustered what gondolas we could—went to the fort and secured as much as our vessels could bring away. When the gondolas arrived in Durham river, it was froze far down, and we were about two days in sawing the ice and getting up the boats, and one day more in storing and distributing the stores; in this you were obliging enough to assist us;—but whether that was being directly or indirectly concerned, I shall not determine.

Nothing can be more unjust than your calling up again the matter of Congress voting me a hundred dollars for assisting to take the cannon, etc., from the fort; when it was so fully discussed in the public prints, about four years since, and the malicious charge refuted. The Hon. Judge Livermore who was in Congress with me, publicly declared and all the then members of Congress will attest, that the vote was passed in my absence, and upon a petition for my allowance in seperate departments, in which it was incidentally mentioned my being one of the first opposition and amongst those who first dared to attack a King's fort. The committee reported me a hundred dollars, and cut me off three quarters of my allowance in seperate departments; the vote passed before I returned into Congress. I was the person who rose and violently opposed the measure—told them I was so far from asking or wishing such a grant, that as it would open a door for similar grants, I could not from principle accept it; but Congress finding, how much I was cut short in my allowance for seperate commands advised me to a compromise, to take the sum voted in full and release my demands in seperate departments. Thus by a compromise I had a hundred dollars voted, for releasing more than a thousand. Any person who wishes to be satisfied of these facts may apply to the Hon. Judge Livermore, or to any member then in Congress, or may by having recourse to the statement of facts by me,—and the proofs adduced in my answer to letters signed Candidus in the beginning of 1785, be fully convinced of the injustice of the accusation. . . .

JOHN SULLIVAN.

Durham, March 14, 1789.

The trouble between General Sullivan and Judge Ebenezer Thompson, arising out of this and other disputes, seems to have been settled the following year by a letter from General

Sullivan, the original of which is now in the possession of Mr. Lucien Thompson, of Durham, and of which the following is a facsimile:

Concord June 18th 1790

Sir

I am so far from wishing to have war
kept up between your family & mine
and to continue a dispute which can
only ~~be~~ ^{be} a source of trouble & disappointment to both
that I now make you this proposal
To drop all suits now pending at all the
Courts each one paying his own costs and
for your Son & myself to give releases to
each other for the cases complained of in
them and let each one endeavor to
seek himself to restore that harmony and
good will which ^{has} been so long lost by an
unhappy dispute which has been very
injurious to the Interest of both parties Your
with due consideration Sir your most
Obedient Servant,
for Sullivan
Hon^{ble} Ebenezer Thompson Esq

These letters leave absolutely no doubt that, in the first instance, the powder and other military stores were brought to Durham to be from there distributed. Whether or not part of the powder was lodged under the pulpit of the Durham meeting-house must remain, as heretofore, a matter of tradition; but the fact that the Rev. Mr. Adams was of the party, and that, with the exception of General Sullivan's own house, it was one of the nearest buildings to the landing where the powder was unloaded, lends probability to the report. We know positively, as the family tradition has always held, that some of the powder was stored in the house of Ebenezer Thompson, which is still standing in Durham, and is still occupied by a descendant of the judge in the person of Mr. Lucien Thompson. There is little doubt, too, that, in the subsequent distribution, a considerable portion of the powder was left with Maj. John Demerit of Madbury. Such has been the unvarying tradition in Durham. Powder and balls from Fort William and Mary, which had been kept in the original magazine built in the Madbury home, are now in the possession of the New Hampshire Historical Society, donated in 1887 by Mr. John Demerit (now also major) of Madbury, N. H., a direct descendant and namesake of Major Demerit. Miss Mary P. Thompson, writing for the *Independent Statesman* of Nov. 17, 1887, states that the wife of Major Demerit's grandson, who had had charge of Major Demerit during the last six years of his life, related to her the accounts of the capture of the fort and the preservation of this powder, as she had heard it from Major Demerit. Also, in Brewster's *Rambles about Portsmouth*, it is asserted that Daniel P. Drown, calling upon Major Demerit in 1799 or 1800, was given two charges of this powder for his rifle with the statement that it was taken from Fort William and Mary.

It is certainly true that a large part of the powder was afterwards distributed among the several towns. This is indicated by General Sullivan's letter and by the journal of congress, and has also been well brought out by Hon. John G. Crawford in an article read before the New Hampshire Society Sons of the

American Revolution.¹ Several documents quoted in the New Hampshire Provincial Papers, Vol. VII, also show this to have been a fact. The arms brought from Portsmouth were repaired and put in order at Durham, for in the Durham town records² it is recorded that at March 31, 1783, town-meeting it was "Voted that the selectmen be directed to allow Thomas Wille 20/9 in full for repairing the guns brought from Fort Wm and Mary."

THE PARTICIPANTS.

It is unfortunate that so little is known about the actual leaders and those who joined with them in the attacks upon the fort. The newspapers of the time were silent upon the question, and even the official reports contain scarcely a reference, simply saying that the leaders were well known. The act was one of open treason to the king, and, as it was the almost unanimous act of the community, but little was written or published that might injure the participants. A few names only are preserved to us. Governor Wentworth says that the first attack was carried out by citizens of Portsmouth, Rye, and Newcastle. No individual is named. General Sullivan says the powder was sent to him by a messenger from Colonel Long, and, if he remembered correctly, signed also by John Langdon. John Sullivan was the unquestioned leader of the second attack. Jeremy Belknap, who wrote during the lives of both Langdon and Sullivan and was a close friend of the latter, credits the leadership to these two prominent New Hampshire men. Judge Ebenezer Thompson, in the *New Hampshire Spy*, says: "Hon. John Langdon and others took the powder." John M. Whitton³ is the first to claim Thomas Pickering as a leader. No previous mention of his name in this connection has come to light, and Whitton does not give his authority. The History of Manchester, 1856,⁴ Report of the Adjutant-General for New Hampshire, 1866,⁵ and Brewster's Rambles about Portsmouth speak of Thomas Pickering

¹ Proceedings of the N. H. Sons Am. Rev., 1889-97.

² Vol. II, p. 220.

³ History of New Hampshire, 1834, p. 122.

⁴ P. 408.

⁵ Vol. II, p. 263.

as being the leader in the first attack. All three take their authority from Daniel¹ P. Drown, a nephew of Pickering, who had received his version of the affair from his father, Samuel Drown, whom he stated as a participant. Brewster, obtaining his information from the same source, states also that Sullivan, Langdon, George Frost of Durham, and Dr. Bartlett of Kingston, were present. The account by Drown is so inaccurate in many particulars that it is doubtful if his memory of his father's story was correct in regard to the others. Brewster¹ also states that Pierse Long assisted in the removal of the powder which General Sullivan's article, before quoted, confirms. From the *New Hampshire Spy* we learn that Judge Ebenezer Thompson went with the party as far as Portsmouth, but was not present at the fort, and that the Rev. Mr. Adams, Deacon Norton, Lieutenant Durgin, Capt. Jonathan Woodman, Mr. Aaron Davis, and, probably, Mr. Footman of Dover, were actively engaged in the second attack.

Mr. Eleazer Bennet of Durham, who was probably the last survivor of those who took part in the affair, gave a full description to the Rev. Mr. Tobey of Durham, who published it in an obituary notice of Mr. Bennet, in the *Congregational Journal* of Feb. 18, 1852. It is unfortunate for our purpose that Mr. Bennet was one hundred years old at the time Mr. Tobey took down his statement, for his account is very inaccurate, and with the exception of adding several names of those present contains nothing of value. He enumerated John Sullivan, Winborn Adams, Ebenezer Thompson, John Demerit of Madbury, Alpheus Chesley, Jonathan Chesley, Peter French (a law student in Sullivan's office), John Spencer, Micah Davis, Edward Sullivan, Isaac Small, Benjamin Small, and himself, as members of the party. It is worthy of note that he makes no mention of Alexander Scammell, although in the narrative as quoted in Amory's *Life of Sullivan* as coming from the same source his name is included. It is probable that Amory copied this account from the highly imaginary article in *Harper's Monthly* of July, 1886, rather than from the original publication. However, in

¹ Vol. II, p. 276.

a letter to the senate of New Hampshire of Feb. 14, 1785,¹ General Sullivan says that he was assisted by his three clerks in bringing the stores up the river, and this leaves but little doubt that Alexander Scammell, Peter French, and James Underwood, who were at that time in his office, were with him at the second attack. Another account by a survivor of the Exeter party, and published by Governor Bell in his History of Exeter, also differs so much from the known facts that little credence can be given to any part of it. It does not seem wise to further quote either of these accounts.

THE POWDER AT BUNKER HILL.

It has always been the tradition in southeastern New Hampshire, founded upon the statements of persons who claimed to have the facts from the actors themselves, that Major John Demerit took a cart load of the powder, captured at Portsmouth, from the magazine at his house, to Cambridge, and reached there just in time for its opportune use at Bunker Hill. No inhabitant of Madbury or Durham doubts the story, but it cannot with our present knowledge be proven. On the other hand there is nothing to render it improbable. The official documents of the time are silent upon the question.

On the fly leaf of an application dated April 21, 1775, from the Committee of Correspondence in Portsmouth to a like committee in Exeter, a statement, made at the time, is given of the quantity of powder stored in Exeter and vicinity.² It states that at that time there were twelve barrels at Kingston, eight at Epping, four at Poplin, eight at Nottingham with Major Cilley, six at Brentwood, one at Londonderry, four at Portsmouth, and twenty-nine at Exeter. It is quite probable that this represents part of the powder from Fort William and Mary, but there is nothing to indicate the fact except, perhaps, that Major Cilley's name appears as a custodian, and he was directed by the Exeter Committee of Safety³ on the 7th of the following August "to apply to the Selectmen of the Several

¹ N. H. State Papers, Vol. XVIII, p. 749.

² Bell's History of Exeter, p. 242.

³ N. H. Provincial Papers, Vol. VII, p. 573.

Towns in this Colony with whom was lodged the powder taken last winter from Fort Willm & Mary, take an account of what is now in their Custody respectively and request of them forthwith to convey the whole of it to Col. Nicholas Gilman at Exeter." This request to Major Cilley was the result of a letter from General Sullivan to the Committee of Safety, under date of August 4th, at Winter Hill, stating that the army was in sore straits for powder, and asking that at least twenty barrels be sent at once.¹ There is no doubt that Major Cilley carried out his instructions, and that much of the powder from Fort William and Mary was carried to Winter Hill, for General Sullivan in a subsequent letter claims to have supplied the troops at Winter Hill, when in sore need, with powder. On June 2d the Committee of Supplies had been ordered to "apply and obtain the Quantity and Quality of the Powder bro't from the Fort Wm and Mary, also take it into their possession and lay the state of it before the Committee of Safety"² but there is no record of their having carried out their orders. In fact the latter instructions to Major Cilley would seem to indicate that this order was not carried into effect. Now, although much of this powder was probably sent to General Sullivan at Winter Hill, there is nothing to indicate that the portion retained in Durham was not previously used at Bunker Hill. There are two facts, apart from tradition, which seem to show the truth of the statement, and that the tradition was not of recent birth.

C. E. Potter, in his *History of Manchester*, 1856, *p.* 410, states in a footnote that Major Demerit took the powder to Bunker Hill, and further says that a "gentleman is now living in Portsmouth to whom he gave some of it for squirrel hunting, after relating the taking of the fort, remarking as he gave it, 'Here, try this powder, this is the kind we killed the red coats with at Bunker Hill.'" Still earlier, on May 21, 1823, at the Portsmouth Bicentennial Anniversary celebration, the following toast was printed on the programme: "Major Sullivan and Capt Langdon. Our delegates to Congress in '75 who

¹ N. H. Provincial Papers, Vol. VII, *p.* 572.

² N. H. Provincial Papers, Vol. VII, *p.* 497.

supplied Bunker Hill with Powder from his Majesties fort at Pascataquack." ¹

WAS THE CAPTURE OF FORT WILLIAM AND MARY THE FIRST
OVERT ACT OF THE REVOLUTION?

There is no question that previous to Dec. 14, 1774, bodies of men had destroyed private property owing to their disapproval of British methods, and in a few cases had even assaulted the royal power. But the capture of Fort William and Mary was the first organized fight of the Revolutionary War, and on Dec. 14, 1774, the first gun of that war was fired. It is true that on Dec. 5, 1774, the assembly of Rhode Island ordered the powder and shot in Fort George to be removed to a place of safety, and it is further true that it was done with the same intent and purpose, and undoubtedly influenced the subsequent action at Portsmouth. It was accomplished without opposition and was simply the confiscation of stores already in their possession. The taking of the schooner *Gaspee*, eight guns, commanded by Lieutenant Duddington, at Gaspee Point, R. I., on June 9, 1772,² has been held to be the first assault against the crown, but erroneously, for it in nowise differs in principle from the act of firing upon the schooner *St. John* in July, 1764;³ the seizure of the *Maidstone's* boat at Newport⁴ in May, 1765, or the scuttling of the British armed sloop *Liberty* at Newport, in 1769.⁵ All were directed against the vessels of the British navy carrying the king's colors, but they were directed against the particular vessel that suffered on account of real injuries to the participants or to the community, and not from any uprising against the general authority of Great Britain. Arnold states in his account of the destruction of the *Gaspee* that "Lieut. Duddington, the commander, had practiced every arrogance upon vessels in the bay, detaining them often without a colorable pretext, stopping even market boats, and in some cases plundering people on shore."

The "Battle of Alamance," in North Carolina, on May 16,

¹*Portsmouth Journal* of May, 1823; also N. H. Historical Society Collections, Vol. II, p. 195.

² Arnold's History of Rhode Island, p. 309.

³*Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 297.

1771, was entirely of a local nature, and was fought between a band of so-called "regulators" and volunteer militia of their own province. Also, according to Hildreth (Hist. of U. S., Vol. II, p. 570), the regulators themselves became staunch supporters of the royal authority. The three and one half years intervening between this affair and that of William and Mary is sufficient in itself to separate it from the Revolutionary period.

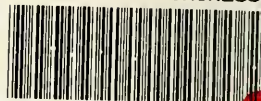
The opinion of Rev. Alonzo H. Quint, D. D., in regard to the capture of Fort William and Mary, is often well quoted in the words, "The daring character of this assault cannot be over-estimated. It was an organized investment of a royal fortress, where the king's flag was flying, and where the king's garrison met them with muskets and artillery. It was four months before Lexington, and Lexington was resistance to attack, while this was a deliberate assault. When the king heard of this capture it so embittered him that all hope of concessions was at an end. It made war inevitable."

NOTE.—Besides the references given in the text, articles of more or less value bearing on the capture of Fort William and Mary are quite numerous. They are generally more popular in character than historic. The following will serve for reference:

- McClintock's History of New Hampshire, p. 298.
- Barstow's History of New Hampshire, p. 231.
- History of Nottingham, N. H., p. 120.
- History of Rockingham and Strafford Co., N. H., p. 805.
- Pickering Genealogy, by Eddy Sup., p. 4.
- Adams' Annals of Portsmouth, N. H.
- N. E. Hist. and Gen. Reg., XXIII, p. 337; XXIV, p. 224; XXXII, p. 34.
- Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings, XIV, p. 150.
- Amory's Life of General Sullivan, p. 295.
- N. H. Revolutionary Rolls, Vol. I, p. 3.
- Judge Ebenezer Thompson, by M. P. Thompson, p. 25.
- Magazine of New England History, III, p. 200.
- American Irish Historical Society, Vol. I, p. 34.
- Several articles in the Portsmouth, N. H., *Journal* and Dover, N. H., *Republican*, by Miss Mary P. Thompson and Dr. Alonzo H. Quint from September, 1886, to February, 1887.
- New Castle, Historical and Picturesque, p. 22.
- New York *American Monthly Magazine*, November, 1892.
- Granite Monthly*, article by Dr. A. H. Quint, Vol. I, p. 190.
- Granite Monthly*, article by Hon. Geo. W. Nesmith, Vol. I, p. 325.
- Granite Monthly*, article by M. G. Colby, Vol. V, p. 22.
- Proceedings N. H. Sons American Revolution, 1889-1897, p. 78.
- Exeter, N. H., *Gazette*, Sept. 17, 1886.
- Address Exeter, N. H., Quarter Millennial, 1888, by Hon. Charles H. Bell.

- Harper's Magazine*, July, 1886.
New York Times, July, 1886, by. M. P. Thompson.
 Springfield, Mass., *Homestead*, August 14, 1886.
 Dover, N. H., *Enquirer*, Sept. 17, 1886.
 Portsmouth, N. H., *Daily Penny Post*, Dec. 17, 1886.
 Concord, N. H., *Independent Statesman*, Nov. 17, 1887.
 Concord, N. H., *People and Patriot*, Feb. 23, 1888.
 Manchester *Union*, December, 1898.
 Dedication of Sullivan Monument at Durham, N. H., pub. 1896. *ff.* 9, 13, 17, 18,
 27, 28, 73, 100, and 107.
 Spark's Life of Sullivan.
 Botta's History of the United States.
 Bryant's History of the United States.
 Bancroft's History of the United States.
 The First Parish in Dover, N. H., by Rev. A. H. Quint, D. D., *p.* 27.
 The 100th Anniversary of National Independence, 1876, by Rev. A. H. Quint,
 D. D., *p.* 35.
 General Sullivan not a Pensioner of Lucerne, 1874, *p.* 4.
 General Sullivan not a Pensioner of Lucerne, 1875, *p.* 6.
 Wentworth Genealogy, Vol. 1, *p.* 539.

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